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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on one aspect of the attempt of higher education to meet learning needs of older students--adult residential programs. Adult residential education is a growing interest of American higher education. Since 1950 adult residential programs have increased in number from a handful to more than one hundred. The response appears to be a transition between prejudice against older students and a future realization that part-time adult students are an important part of the mission of higher education. This review of the literature on adult residential programs has five elements: (1) a summary of some characteristics of adult learners who participate in residential education; (2) an identification of some of the major characteristics of adult residential programs; (3) a review of research on the effectiveness of such programs; (4) an analysis of the conclusions, methodology, and questions of research in adult residential education; and (5) a review of some of the operational models of adult residential education. (Author)

ADULT RESIDENTIAL EDUCATION:

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

By: Dan Flanagan

Adult residential education is a growing interest of American higher education. Since 1950 adult residential programs have increased in number from a handful to more than one hundred. The response appears to be a transition between prejudice against older students (Giles) and a future realization that part-time adult students are an important part of the mission of higher education. (McNeill) This paper focuses on one aspect of the attempt of higher education to meet learning needs of older students--adult residential programs. This review of the literature on adult residential programs will have five elements: (1) a summary of some characteristics of adult learners who participate in residential education; (2) an identification of some of the major characteristics of adult residential programs; (3) a review of research on the effectiveness of such programs; (4) an analysis of the conclusions, methodology, and questions of research in adult residential education; and (5) a review of some of the operational models of adult residential education.

Characteristics of Adult Residential Learners

It is difficult to generalize from the literature the characteristics of adult learners who participate in residential programs. Wientge and Lahr (1966) suggest that adult residential programs attract persons who are likely to be married and employed full-time. They are generally unable to participate in full-time programs of higher education because of economics and time constraints. Educational involvement is a subsidiary concern for these persons.

The most common method of describing the adult residential learner is by identifying reasons for his/her participation in residential education. Ecklund (1970), for example, suggests the following typology: (1) the person whose formal education was limited and finds need for vocational knowledge (to advance or change vocational goals); (2) professional persons seeking to augment their knowledge and skills; (3) retired persons, or persons interested in knowledge for its own sake; and (4) those persons seeking solutions to community problems. Burgess (1971) conducted research into the reasons why adults participate in programs of higher education. He found several significant reasons:

- a. A desire to know;
- b. To fulfill personal goals;
- c. To fulfill social goals;
- d. To find social activity;
- e. To escape from day-to-day activities;
- f. To comply with requirements (vocationally).

It seems clear, though, that one must examine each program to discover the uniqueness of its participants. The type of adult learning needs vary with the physical environment and with each person. For example, the literature includes several rather unique adult residential programs serving the unique needs of persons. Everywoman's Village in California (Loeffelbein) attracts women who are likely to be over thirty five years of age, married, and seeking new directions for their lives. Loeffelbein calls Everywoman's Village "a halfway house" between a woman's family and the future beyond it.

The characteristics of the adult learner in the Adult Degree Program of Goddard College are likely to be quite different. The adult learner at Goddard is between twenty six and sixty years of age and middle class. A majority are white and most of the participants are female. (Pitkins and Bates) Whereas Everywoman's Village is non-degree granting, Goddard attempts to meet the needs of those students seeking bachelor of arts credentials.

Fircroft College in Great Britain serves another distinct kind of student. (Norman) Fircroft students tend to be interested in political, economic and social questions, and they are looking to change employment towards fields associated with these interests. The adult learner at Fircroft tends to be a skilled, semi-skilled or clerical worker who gained an interest in education only after formal schooling ended. (Norman)

Each program seems to serve and/or attract a unique type of adult learner. There seem to be a variety of reasons adults participate in residential education, and a variety of programs have been developed to meet the particular needs of the adult learner.

Characteristics of Adult Residential Programs

Adult residential education is distinct from adult education-in-residence. (Kafka) A program of residential education, which is the focus of this review, is an attempt to integrate living experiences with learning. Adult residential education programs can take place in on-campus or off-campus facilities and are aimed at bringing adult learners together for a period of time, away from the distractions of everyday activities.* (U. of Chicago)

*See also "What is Continuing Education?" in Continuing Education, No 1, 1965, by the University of Chicago.

Learning activities in these programs may be an extension of existing interests or an attempt to acquire new knowledge and skills. (Norman)

Adult residential education has its roots historically in the Danish folk schools, lyceum and chatauqua.* (Schacht; Ecklund) Many of the characteristics of adult residential programs as they exist today are largely influenced by the W. R. Kellogg Foundation. The Kellogg Foundation has been the most generous single source of revenue for adult residential programs since 1951.

The literature on American adult residential education suggests short-term programs have been more popular. Long-term programs seem to be more popular in Britain. (Bentley) There are three basic types of short-term programs: (1) a four to six week period intended to cover a complete course structure; (2) a one to two week period of concentrated study; or (3) a brief two or three day (weekend) period concentrating on one topic. The second and third options appear to be more popular than the first option in America. Ecklund suggests one reason for the popularity of short-term residential education may be that short-term programs tend to increase motivation for learning.

The structural characteristics of adult residential programs generally fall into three categories: (1) the physical isolation and detachment from everyday activities; (2) concentration on a topic (or continuity); and (3) group support (both instructor and student support). (Kafka) Schacht speaks of the first element

as both physical and psychological detachment, the second element
 *See also In Quest of Knowledge; A Historical Perspective on Adult Education. C. Hartley Grattan, 1955, Association Press, New York.

as the peripheral concern of education becoming a primary concern, and the third element as the involvement of the whole person. Schacht and Kafka may mean different things by the third element. The common theme running through the concept of group support (kafka) and involvement of the whole person (Schacht) seems to be the involvement of both the cognitive and affective self in the learning process.*

In sum, adult residential education programs are characterized by residence, intensity and continuity, and maximized support from both faculty and students. The community of learners share at least one interest (Ecklund) and all activities of the program are focused on achieving that goal. Rapid transfer of knowledge, "updating, relearning, and unlearning" characterize adult residential programs. (Ecklund)

Effectiveness of Adult Residential Programs

Research results on the effectiveness of adult residential programs are generally positive, but researchers differ on their conclusions concerning the direct influence of residence in adult learning. Kafka and Lacognata offer insight into the problem.

In a study completed at the University of Chicago, James Kafka found research evidence that supported the concept of adult residential programs as "temporary system." Although he found no positive correlation between group support and cognitive achievement, he did find positive correlations between content concentration and group isolation with cognitive achievement.

*For a complete annotated bibliography of literature on adult residential education to 1969, see Clearinghouse on Adult Education, Residential Education, Current Information Sources, No. 25, October, 1969.

Kafka concluded that residential facilities were not inextricably linked with superior adult learning experiences. "Instead, the characteristics of the program and the predisposition of the learners appeared to be consistently of greater predictive value than the simple fact of residence." (Kafka, 14) Hence, program development is more important to Kafka than architectural design.

Kafka suggests that temporary programs in adult residential education could be most effective. Longer periods of concentration tend to increase competition and produce negative results. (Kafka) Short-term programs, on the other hand, could tend to maximize any positive influences of residence on learning and growth.

A. A. Lacognata was much more positive in his conclusions from research conducted at Michigan State University. Lacognata compared results of a residential group and a non-residential group of adults involved in an insurance course. The following is a summary of his findings:

- a. Knowledge acquisition for residential students tended to be superior to non-residential students;
- b. Knowledge application for residential students tended to be superior to non-residential students;
- c. Residential students were more likely to study outside formal class sessions;
- d. Resident students associated more with fellow students and tended to talk more about the class subject;
- e. Resident students tended to be more appreciative of out-of-class learning and interaction with the instructor;
- f. Resident students found their isolation from problems at home significant.

In short, Lacognata not only found improved cognitive achievement in the students participating in residential education, but he also found residential instruction beneficial in effecting change in self-perception and affective growth.

Another significant research project was conducted at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri by King Wientge and James Lahr. Their results were considerably less positive toward the effects of adult residential programs than Kafka and Lacognata. Their comparison was of a short-term residence combined with traditional class sessions and another program using only traditional class sessions. The method of instruction was controlled as a variable. Wientge and Lahr concluded that the residential component failed to enhance learning and it did not affect the attitudes of the adult learner to any significant degree.

Most research has concluded that the residence programs are beneficial (in some way). They seem to make learning more of a pleasure. (Kingsbury) Residence also tends to create an environment which enhances change. (Schacht)

In sum, the effectiveness of adult residential education on cognitive achievement may be more of a hope than reality. Kafka suggests that the characteristics of the program and the predisposition of the learner may be more important predictors of success than residence itself. Lacognata and others, though, seem to draw direct correlations between the characteristics of an adult residential education program and cognitive (as well as affective) achievement.

Analysis of the Literature

A review of the literature on adult residential programs suggests some questions about methodology and conclusions drawn by researchers, points to possible new directions in programming and opens new avenues for research. One must be cautious not

to over generalize the findings of a particular research project. The uniqueness of each research project sometimes tends to be overshadowed by attempts to generalize its results.

The variables in adult residential programs are many. To date, researchers have been unable to adequately control enough variables to produce valid inferences on the effectiveness of the residential component. Secondly, the effectiveness of adult residential education may be measured in more than cognitive achievement. Affective growth may also be an important outcome.

Researchers have been able to determine with some degree of certainty that the length of time and the depth of subject concentration has significant positive influences on adult learning. Research has been less consistent about the positive influence of group support.

One of the most penetrating questions comes from Bentley. Referring to the total budget of the Kellogg Center at the University of Chicago (near one million dollars), he noted only twenty percent of the budget was used for educational programming. Bentley considers this an example of the American business approach to the provision of residential education facilities and a loss of the intimacy and educational value Pitkin found in residential programming. (Bentley)

Houle offers a unique suggestion for changing adult residential programs. The literature suggests that relatively few programs utilize preparatory and sequential educational activities. Goddard College is an example of a program using both. Further research could measure the effectiveness of such preparatory and sequential activities.

There is relatively little research into the effectiveness of adult residential education. Much of the research is over a decade old. Problems such as retention levels of student participants, affective growth and the effectiveness of programs varying in time commitments require further research. Research evidence is far from conclusive on the effectiveness of adult residential education on cognitive and affective growth.

Models of Adult Residential Programs

Several models have already been referred to: Goddard College, Everywoman's Village, and Fircroft College. Each of the models used as a research base for the literature has something unique to offer. Bromwoods (Washington University), Rutgers, Chicago University and Michigan State University are just a few examples.*

Two unique models utilize technology in different ways. The first model is Wansfell, a program associated with the British Open University. (Kingsbury) Wansfell's short-term residential concept is in coordination with courses offered by the Open University through educational television. Kingsbury suggests that the television series acts as a motivator for learning activities during the residency period.

Technology is a key factor also at the New England Center in Durham, New Hampshire. Educational technology is used most advantageously to enhance the learning activities while in residence and to improve subsequent learning. (Day)

*For further references to models for adult residential education, see Continuing Education in Action: Residential Centers for Lifelong Learning by Alford, Harold, 1968, John Wiley and Sons, Inc; Studies and Training in Continuing Education: A Directory of Residential Continuing Education Centers in the United States and Abroad, 1967-68, University of Chicago, August, 1968; A Directory

In conclusion, interest in adult residential education seems to be growing. A standard set of program characteristics is difficult to achieve since most programs have been tailored to the needs of a particular population. A variety of adult learners are served through residential programs. Professional persons as well as persons without formal training in higher education seek residential education. Research, thus far, seems to indicate that adult residential programs contribute positively to growth by isolating a person from her/his natural environment and by making the learning activity a focal concern. Research findings have been inconsistent in assessing the positive influence of support from both faculty and students for change. A review of the literature into the effectiveness of adult residential education appears to have opened a number of possibilities for further research.

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